

Jiseul

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ABSTRACT

This is a miracle in movies. It's the best shaman ritual with tears and blood through the camera. It's Muel O's talent to make it embracing the ordinary life not with the formalism of intellectuals. 'Jiseul' is one of the best movies this year and full of the immortal spirit. This is the review on the outcome from the minimal condition. You can imagine the outcome from more fulfilling conditions. It's time that we should fully support him who is dreaming to fly high where nobody has paid attention.

Keywords: movies, shaman ritual, Muel O's ordinary life, 'Jiseul', the immortal spirit, the minimal condition



Film Director, O Muel

As a representative of the Jeju-based independent culture project, Terror J, director Muel O chooses to direct films set on his

native Jeju Island. Born in 1971, O has directed several feature films-» most recently Nostalgia in 2009- in addition to various plays and performances. He also organized a street art festival called Flower for a Jeju Head, in codirector at the Jeju Independent Films Society, and acts as artistic director of the Japari Research Center.«

Films

2009. Nostalgia
2009. Ppongtol
2011. Wind of Island
2012. Jiseul

Prizes

2013 Sundance Films Festival World Cinema Grand Jury Prize: Dramatic -Jiseul
2013 19th FICA, Vesoul International of Asian Cinema GOLDEN CYCLO Award

It was a rare opportunity when I was invited to

the premiere of 'Jiseul' in Jeju. I felt hesitant at first since I haven't contributed anything to the filmmaking of Director Muel O. However, despite feeling sorry for him, I attended it since it was the movie about 4.3 filmed on Jeju by the Jeju-born director. Honestly, I cried after the premier. It was because of the appreciation for the possibility of filmmaking in this barren island rather than the plot of the movie.

'Jiseul', Fourth Independent Movie of Jeju-born Director Muel O

'Jiseul', an indie movie with the running time of 108 minutes by young Jeju-born Director O Muel premiered at the 2012 Busan International Film Festival and won a total of four awards including the Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema Award, the Citizen Critics' Award, the Director's Guild of Korea Award for Best Director, and the CGV Movie Collage Award.

It was shocking news to those who haven't thought of filmmaking in Jeju.

'Jiseul' carries on the spirit of the late Director Kim Kyeong-ryul who passed away working on the filmmaking project after he had finished the first movie about 4.3, 'Time that has not ended'. That's why the title of this movie is 'Time that has not ended 2 – 'Jiseul'. This movie is meaningful in that filmmaking joined the art world about 4.3 and it has broadened the interpretation of art about 4.3 with the director's unique artistic interpretation of history and film language.

'Jiseul' consists of 4 sequences; Shinwi (Setting up the tablet to invite the spirit), Shinmyo (Shaman ritual for the spirit), Eumbok (Sharing food from the ritual), and Soji (Burning the paper tablet). This strategy is shown in the director's interview, "I filmed it with the mind of

having the ancestral rites for those who passed away during 4.3." This is the background of his intention to release his film in Jeju. Since the film itself is like the ancestral rites, the table for that should be prepared in Jeju.

The movie starts with a black-and-white long take, and then shows scattered utensils for ancestral rites on the floor of a private house in the smoke. This scene implies that this movie should be made as the ancestral rites. The background of the movie is Dongkwang-ri where residents couldn't have the ancestral rites due to 4.3. That symbolizes the history of 4.3. The ancestral rites are annual events and ordinary culture of people. The tragic historic incident is a situation in which the ancestral rites couldn't be carried out. That's the motivation that pushed the director to film this movie.

The movie is based on a real story when scorched-earth tactics started in winter of 1948. On November 15, 1948, soldiers raided a mountainous village Dongkwang-ri, killed residents, and burned the village in 3 days. Villagers had to flee to the mountain to survive. 120 villagers hid in a cave Keunneolgwe. Keunneolgwe means a big and wide cave in Jeju dialect. Lava tubes in Jeju, UNESCO Natural Heritage sites today, were the best shelters for Jeju people at that time.

The movie is based on a true story but it's not realistic. It's not a fiction either. Rather, the director embraces the incident with a monochrome tone and creates a unique movie. He shows highly advanced skills compared to his previous 3 movies. The camera shows the scenes of people who fled to the cave and soldiers stationed to suppress them like a film-poem. His view is shown in his interview,

"I can't tell everything in one movie."

It's not possible to show the historical context and various incidents about 4.3 in one movie. In a sense, all movies use 'Collage'. The director chose to use 'Collage' to depict capturing soldiers, refugees, and a cave. As modern history is approached with a new method, micro-history overcomes the limit of diachronic historiographic description. It's the strategy to figure out the overall historical meaning to find the truth of a lesser-known incident. In this context, this movie could be called a micro-historical realistic movie.

The camera doesn't show general images of the line between life and death, chasing and escaping, and suppression and survival. This movie is not direct. Rather, its approach is to let the audience infer the whole body movement by showing hands and feet. This directing begins under the director's premise that one movie can't express everything. That intention settles properly in the refined black-and-white contrast.

Muel O's film language shares something with those of Charles Spencer Chaplin and Andrei Tarkovsky. His linguistic experiment in the movie is the clue for the future of his movies. This movie fully shows that he has already got his own film language. His color and style are clear although they're not complete yet. The style and view in his previous movies are fully melted in this different-tone movie.

Even in the scene of the cave, the director uses Collage capturing the expression of each person and draws fun situations and lines. Even in the very uncomfortable situation, his directing grasps the lyricism and an unexpected comic and ironic language. In particular, Jeju dialect sounds like a foreign language to mainlanders. Islanders come to life in the variation of words and images. Also, frequent long takes remind me of Tarkovsky, film-poet who paid attention

to the possibility of the movie as the means of search for memories and time art through 'aesthetics of a long take'. This technique successfully expresses a unique color through his view and breath.

Moreover, this movie shows the director's attitude toward nature. It reminds me of the expression of Siegfried Gen the, German geographer who visited Jeju and measured the height of Mt. Halla for the first time in 1901. He said that "Strangely, all in this island including soil, houses, coasts, and people looked like black." In a setting of snowy winter with black-and-white tone, Jeju nature gets simpler. The overall image of the movie with dreary feeling of winter and black-and-white tone reminds me of the images of Jeju's environment by Photographer Byeong-woo Bae. Also, the scene that overlaps the oreum and the breast of a young girl in the middle of the movie is his project that visualizes the old mythology of nature in Jeju. It is expected that Jeju's ecology would get a significant status in his future movies.



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1948,
ONE ISLAND,
ONE GIANT GRAVE

REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

JISEUL

DIRECTED BY O MUEL

STARRING OH YOUNG-SOON | MOON SUK-BUM | YANG JUNG-WON | SUNG MIN-CHUL | CHOI EUN-MI | JANG KYUNG-SUB | UH SUNG-WOOK | KANG HEE

PRODUCTION JAPARI FILM | DISTRIBUTION JINJIN PICTURES | WORLD SALES INDIESTORY INC.

PRODUCER KO HYUK-JIN | DIRECTOR OF CINEMATOGRAPHY YANG JUNG-HOON

EDITOR LEE DO-HYUN | COMPOSER JEON SONG-E, SEO JI-SUN | SOUND LEE SANG-MIN | LIGHTING CHOO KYUNG-YUP | COMPUTER GRAPHIC SHIN MIN-CHUL

New Viewpoint about 4.3

Everything about 4.3 has broken up but a new artistic dimension about 4.3 began in an unexpected field through this movie. This movie shows 50 days in Keunneolgwe, Dongkwang-ri in 1948 during 4.3. This movie shows notorious people like Captain Tak Seong-nok, drug addict and information advisor of the 9th regiment, Lieutenant Major Park Jin-kyeong who expelled moderate Regimental Commander Kim Ik-ryeol and ordered an irrational suppression but was assassinated, and the dreaded Northwest Youth Corps. This way, the movie draws various characteristics of people in the punitive army.

The smoke from burning peppers connects the first part, the middle part with the sound of village burning, and the last part of confrontation of both parties in a cave as a whole. In the end, soldiers who couldn't get in the cave due to the smoke shot randomly while crying over the smoke. Villagers burned peppers to block their entry but cried, coughed, and fainted due to the smoke as well. This acrid smoke is the history of 4.3. It is the 'Joke of history' having each person play a minor role on the stage and making him small. It is the history with an unapproachable status like gods in Greek myth who ignore human wishes or presence of life. They cried due to the acrid peppers in the smoke of history in which ideology was excluded but they were those who were swept by the river of history. The ancestral rites through this movie are for them.

As Director Muel O stated at Guest Visit (GV), although the punitive army is an organization and villagers are the combination of various individuals, he disorganizes the army by drawing out its various characteristics. He tries to find human beings in the cruel army and show their situation. Also, as various witnesses

revealed, although villagers are shown in individual situations and memories, they are grouped in the same place at the same time as victims.

In particular, moving and expanding the scene in accordance with the sound of conversation in the blackout scene in the cave is a metaphor for the grouped villagers. Individual stories of villagers become just 'sound' and are combined with a group of people to successfully express Director O's intention, 'Villagers as a collective'.

At CGV after the premier, one of the audience said "I was so dazed that I wished it would end soon." Actually, I felt the same. After 108 minutes, I felt kind of numbness after a car accident. I had mixed emotions thinking, "History is approached this way.", "Oh, right. This way is possible." "It's like this although I expected."

Jeju 4.3 work was initiated by literature. It started from 'Aunt Suni' of Writer Ki-young, Hyun which was called the revival signal of 4.3. From that point, many poems, novels, plays, and artworks followed it. 'Jeju People's Uprising Exhibition' of Artist Kang Yo-bae and the annual '4.3 Art Festival' of the Tamna Artist Association are good cases. Also, there are tens of '4.3 Outdoor Theatricals' of Hallasan Performance Team. However, regretfully, many people only remember 2 things; Ki-young Hyun and Yo-bae Kang's works. The rest are simply other works on 4.3. It's because there are not many excellent works that surpass the first 4.3 works. The fact that only two artists are remembered means others can't exceed their artistic achievement. Moreover, these days, people are just repeating the same works. Maybe, the productivity of 4.3 artis stalled.

The recent 4.3 work is not fresh. As the truth of erased history came to light, curiosity, anger, freshness, and enthusiasm about history have

broken up. Is it done? New cultural events on 4.3 are not created any more. As usual, there are repetitive 'History Lectures' by the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, '4.3 Seminar' by only professors, and the annual memorial ceremony of the bereaved. In this 4.3 art field where there is nothing new, 'Jiseul' makes us think what 4.3 is.

A fresh young director, who has neither experienced 4.3 nor demonstrated for 4.3, challenges with his 4.3 movie. However, the challenge is not ignorable. In this repetitive 4.3 art field, he seems to show his unique style saying, "I created 4.3 this way. How is it?" Most previous 4.3 works focused on the restoration and recording of the truth. Meanwhile, his temperate scenes and attempts to break from the traditional style of period movies are fresh although it could be criticism based on the result from various situations. Moreover, it shows another artistic achievement compared to existing 4.3 works.

It's been 60 years since the incident but settling 4.3 hasn't reached any breakthrough resolutions. At this juncture, 'Jiseul' seems to ask about the present of 4.3. 'What is 4.3?' The director gave his answer. He implied his answer through the symbolization of tears of both parties in the acrid smoke. The previous 4.3 works didn't give this kind of answer.

Two people who symbolize 'Glocalization Age', 'Psy' and 'Muel O'

Muel O's movies such as 'Nostalgia, 2009' and 'Ppongttol, 2010' are extremely low budget movies. They represent images of his 'Art group Japari'. Actually, in his second movie "Ppongttol", the main actor Sung-pil Kim asks the director Ppongttol why he makes films. The director answers that it's 'Japari'. This could be the philosophical term that defines his movies.

'Japari' is Jeju dialect. It means toying or playing. Actually, it refers to attempts and artistic experiments taking many failures. Art can't be born without 'Japari'. Even supreme masters start with 'Japari'. Therefore, the term 'Japari' in his movie expresses his movies and tells his artistic attitude. In a long term, life itself is 'Japari', isn't it? In it, some succeed and some fail. However, regardless of success and failure, life itself is 'Japari'. Therefore, all arts of human beings are 'Japari' as well.

Most people in Muel O's movie are outsiders. However, his outsiders are even outsiders among outsiders. Outsider characteristics of country bumpkins made by country bumpkins can't be spotted in the media covering outsiders in the city. Reckless, bored, failed, and absurd people and those who create new 'Japari' in his movies may be outsiders of a 'winner takes it all' society where the social safety net has punctured and another opportunity for losers is not allowed. He looks like a formidable strategist. It is his life strategy through his art. It includes being an outsider in the movie field, outsider characteristics that exist out of the island space and geographical border, and filmmaking environment to move from low budget to high budget. It is a long journey from the 'Japari' independent film director to the art film or dramatic movie director.

"Glocalization" is a new term to express this era. This term is contradictory. This new term which combines globalization and localization is a paradox.

Recent 'Psy Fever' is the outcome of the global Internet infrastructure and glocalization. In particular, when the entry to the US market was not easy, 'You-Tube' enabled Korea, a distant Asian country, to make a breakthrough. In the past, Korean singers had to sing in Japanese to

enter the Japanese market. Moreover, in order to enter the American market, they needed the agency which specialized in American style. However, through a totally different route, the Internet, Psy was able to penetrate. However, the contents are ironic, replacing Gangnamstyle with a country bumpkin style. He hit the world with Psy's style. Psy's style took the world by storm by having westerners say 'Gangnam Style' in Korean.

Director Muel O and his country bumpkin style movies remind me of Psy. Psy didn't make a blockbuster level work with a big investment, but he broke through. We can't compare Muel O's work to his but in reality, major production companies or big businesses don't support new directors or indie movies. Ki-deok Kim is struggling by himself. However, O Muel's sensitivity and themes as a country bumpkin make him realize his presence as a native of Jeju, barren field of movies and culture, rather than come back home after succeeding on mainland. I've lived in the country culture, 'Local masters can't be recognized.' and wished artists in Jeju Island, not those from Jeju, could make it in the world. That's because Yo-bae Kang and Ki-young Hyun are 'from Jeju'.

I expect artists in Jeju Island, not those from Jeju, will make it in the world. I admire him for initiating this movement.

Failure of the Jeju Government and Local Infrastructure to Prepare for Creativity.

After the premier of 'Jiseul' at the Busan International Film Festival, the issue of Jeju's administrative system has been raised. Despite the wish of O Muel to premier it in Jeju since it was homage to the late Director Kim Kyeong-ryul and 4. 3 ancestral rites, this may not be possible.

As an indie movie, a premier at major theaters is not possible. Muel O's movie 'Nostalgia' was shown at 8:30 am at Jeju CGV. A low budget indie movie was shown at the major theater but showing an indie movie early in the morning indicates, 'We can show it when we don't show other movies.' With this sad memory, the director really wants to show his movie at the right theater at the right time.

In Jeju, there is the Film Committee and the 'Jeju Film Culture Art Center' is an umbrella organization. Its office is a former major theater downtown. Theater 1 is a free theater and Theater 2 is for rent. Theater 1 shows free old movies with digital files. However, due to the lack of investment, there is no program to run recent DCP, so only DVD movies are shown there. With this system, we can't watch high quality movies. For this premier of 'Jiseul', they brought the system from Seoul but it's not that high level.

There have been many criticisms over the Film Committee and one more to add here. The chairman of the Film Committee is the Governor and the Vice Chairman is in charge of the operation. Does the Governor know this problem?

It's time that we set the theater for art movies and indie movies in Jeju. They're not profitable, so they have difficulties in showing. Even when they barely have a chance to show, they have to withdraw whenever blockbusters are set to show. It's a vicious cycle in Korea. That's why Kim Ki-deok gets upset. In Seoul, there are several theaters for them. However, in Jeju we're blocked from watching artistic and fresh experimental indie movies. Therefore, it's necessary that the free theater should be turned into the theater for art and indie movies. It means a new world is opening in Jeju for

Jeju people and independent movie directors in Korea.

In an interview, pointing out the problem of the local premier system, Director Muel O suggested, "Now, there is no theater and system to premier my movie. There is the Film Culture Art Center but there is no ticketing system. They said they couldn't set the system only for one movie. Now that there is a movie with potential, I wish they start it now." It makes sense. We need to start for next generations of Muel O.

There are 12 indie movie theaters in Seoul, 2 in Busan, and 1 in Incheon and other cities. In Jeju, there was one theater from 2003-2005. We need to upgrade the system to show DCP and improve the administrative system. Also, the Jeju Film Culture Art Center needs to be transformed into the theater for art and indie movies to be a main center for local culture.

Calling the 21st century 'Culture Era' is cliché. It's called the 'Creative Industry Era'. Creativity brings money and improves the economy. Movies, the essence of the creative industry will remain as a significant field in the 21st Century.

The movie made by one from Jeju, a remote area of history and culture, is going toward the world. It may not that big if we see it as just one person's achievement. However, if we see it as a cultural event to overcome the culture complex of this island, it's a new chapter of Jeju culture chronicle. Now, we need to recognize his movie and its cultural context and support him for our next generation.

Movie critic Young-jin Kim wrote, "Muel O had barely made movies where filmmaking had been impossible. Now that he had the minimal conditions to make movies, he made a masterpiece." Also, he praised his artistic achievement,

We can appreciate the meaningful declaration of 'Terror J', his group before 'Japari,' in this case:

Beautiful people should live in a beautiful island.

In order for beautiful people to live,
there should be beautiful spirits.

For that, beautiful culture is necessary.

-Terror J-